



News Release

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Holidays are family time: get to know your family health history

OLYMPIA — While you're visiting with family this holiday season, remember to ask relatives about their health history. You'll likely find you share more than eye color and personality traits; many health conditions can also be passed down within families.

Family health history is important — it's one of the best predictors for disability or chronic illness. Health care providers have known for a long time that common diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease can run in families. Other rare conditions like sickle cell anemia and cystic fibrosis are passed down in families, too.

"It's been said you can't choose your parents, so there's not much we can do to change our genetics," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "But knowing your family's health history gives you a leg up on preventing, detecting, and treating serious diseases. So at upcoming family gatherings, ask questions and record what you learn — it could make a big difference in your life and your family's life."

November is National Family History Month. The U.S. Surgeon General created [a web-based tool to encourage families to discover their health history](https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/) (<https://familyhistory.hhs.gov/>). Use the tool to keep track of disease and other medical conditions that run in your family. Once you've completed the paperwork, share it with your health care provider.

Learning your family's health history provides valuable information that'll help you understand what illnesses for which you may be at risk. Work with your health care team to put together an action plan to keep you healthy.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov> for a healthy dose of information.